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Memorandum of Conversation

Reviewed by: *John D. Newsom*

Date: 5/3/78

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May 24, 1978
Wednesday

SUBJECT: Human Rights and United States Relations with Argentina

PARTICIPANTS: Captain Gualter Allara, Deputy Foreign Minister
Juan Carlos Arlia, Director Human Rights Working Group
Miguel Angel Espere, Director North-American Division
Victor Beaute, North American Division
David D. Newsom Under Secretary of State for Political
Affairs
Raúl Castro, American Ambassador
Fernando Rondon, ARA/ECA

Distribution: S, D, ARA, S/P, PM, HA, OSD/ISA, JCS, NSC-Pastor

After an initial exchange of remarks, the Under Secretary explained that the purpose of his visit to Argentina is to seek to promote a better understanding of the issues we face currently. This is a manifestation of the importance we attach to relations with Argentina. Mr. Newsom commented that he knows Ambassador Castro has a very special feeling for the Latin American scene and has conveyed accurately and effectively U.S. government concerns. Mr. Newsom said he is in Buenos Aires to assist the Ambassador by setting forth current Washington views in the hope of assisting in the examination of our problems. He welcomed Argentina's views on matters which are of current concern.

Deputy Foreign Minister Allara said that Ambassador Castro in his short time has worked very actively in Argentina and has undoubtedly kept the Department of State informed perfectly on the Argentine situation. It is clear, Allara continued, that relations are troubled currently, inasmuch as they are not as effective as they should be. After briefly reviewing the historical context, Allara stated that it is evident the terrorism problem was the most serious one faced by Argentina in March 1976. The dimension and efficacy of the terrorist organizations made it necessary to apply exceptional measures, which are contained in the Argentine Constitution and in Argentine laws. Unfortunately, we can confirm today that our opinions about terrorism are correct, as reflected by

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the existence of this problem in Europe. We are with satisfaction that the United States and European governments are reacting to terrorism by taking exceptional steps to confront this problem. This matter takes us to another aspect of the problem, human rights. Allara continued. Argentina has always respected and revered human rights. It suffered an internal, very special war which required exceptional measures. As Argentina's authorities have acknowledged, excesses were committed. The Argentine government is trying to eliminate these excesses. Nevertheless, there is an active campaign abroad to tarnish Argentina's image. Allara said it is hard for us to understand why we are sanctioned when our objective has been to protect our society and our Occidental Christian style of life. How could anyone wish to see a return to the chaotic state of affairs which existed in 1976 and which we see in Italy?

Mr. Newsom responded that we fully appreciate Argentina has been through a very difficult period. Not only were your countrymen involved but also some of ours. Newsom said, I come also with awareness of the fact that it is difficult for people in other countries to judge fully and understand the circumstances in another country. I come also reflecting full respect for Argentina as an important country. The Under Secretary noted with satisfaction the election of an Argentine Ambassador to head the Committee of The Whole at the SSOD.

Mr. Newsom next described the situation existent in the United States in the 1960's and the subsequent acute concern over human rights. He observed that President Carter's platform included the question of human rights, and a belief that the manner in which we associate with other countries should be affected by the way in which such countries treat their own citizens. Mr. Newsom acknowledged that in the diplomatic realm this brings us into areas that are sensitive in other people's societies. He said it is not the intention of the United States government to intervene in other societies. But it is evident in Congress and our public that where U.S. government programs are involved, we want to avoid associations which suggest endorsement of countries where it is believed government violate human rights. This means the Executive has not been free to continue programs when the Congressional and public perspective of human rights in the recipient country is negative. It is true that while there is an appreciation that Argentina had difficult terrorist problems, requiring extraordinary measures, there is also a strong feeling that many of those measures resulted

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in excesses in terms of disappearances, torture, and indignities suffered by people. This has made it difficult for the United States to go ahead with military and economic programs. I am here to talk about the future, Mr. Newsom stated, not the past, and to learn what the Argentine government realistically feels it can do and is doing to correct perspective. We appreciate that Argentina has already taken some important steps: Christmas amnesty, the release of Timerman, freedom for members of the Deutsch family, the exercise of the "right of option" and instructions from the Minister of Interior to the police to refrain from inhuman actions toward individuals apprehended for terrorism and political crimes.

Mr. Newsom stated that he would be interested in any projections Argentina has of measures to be expected. He also asked for the Ministry's view on how Argentina regards the work of international organizations such as the Inter-American Human Rights Committee and the International Committee of Jurists. Newsom inquired whether one might anticipate Argentine permission for an outside committee to review its policies.

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Captain Allara responded that there has been no intentional, systematic policy of the Argentine government to commit excesses. The needs of counter-terrorism did make it necessary to suspend individual liberties in a state of siege, as provided for by the Argentine Constitution. Allara observed that the state of siege was proclaimed before the armed forces took the government. Allara referred to Argentine economic, social and counter-terrorist successes, noting that Argentine streets are among the safest in the world. He declared that Argentina has unrestricted freedom of the press, citing the publication a few days ago of a long list of disappeared individuals in La Prensa. This was a paid advertisement. Allara also pointed to the operations of the League for the Rights of Man, which is a collateral organization of the Communist Party.

The Under Secretary asked whether this is the organization whose leader was arrested. After Allara responded affirmatively, Newsom noted that he was bound to be questioned about this.

Allara continued his exposition, describing the independence of the Executive and Judicial branches of government. He stated it is the government's intention to return to due process as soon as circumstances permit. He commented that the continued activity of terrorists requires prudence.

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Allara stated that Argentina needs understanding and cooperation. Sanctions do not contribute to human rights, he said.

With respect to international organizations, Allara said that Argentine representatives have gone to all human rights forums. Argentina has tried to play a positive role, seeking a sincere promotion of human rights. In 1977 at Grenada, Argentina sought specifically to strengthen the IAHRC. It also voluntarily approached the IAHRC and offered a dialogue of substance and to accept advice and recommendations. We gave them our point of view and agreed to meet again in May, Allara reported. Surprisingly in January the IAHRC decided to prepare a report on Argentina and to request an invitation to visit this country. Allara accused the IAHRC of suspending the dialogue unilaterally - a dialogue which Allara felt would be fruitful.

Allara expressed his doubts about the objectivity of human rights organizations which are advised by terrorists, as occurred in Geneva. In response to Newsom's question about the IAHRC decision, Allara replied that his government has not yet decided whether to invite the IAHRC. At Argentina's initiative, Allara stressed, Foreign Minister Montes will meet with the IAHRC before the OASGA.

Allara referred to the worries which Ambassador Aja Espil expressed in Washington with regard to military export licenses and credits.

The Under Secretary explained the delays surrounding Eximbank credits because the Bank's authorization bill is before the Congress. One of the issues the Congress is dealing with concerns human rights. Consequently the Bank is acting very cautiously during this period with respect to countries where human rights problems exist. This is not a sanction nor affirmative action by the Bank, Mr. Newsom stressed. It is a delay until the nature of the Congressional authorization is determined.

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